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ABSTRACT

Despite Korea's current emphasis on college entrance exams and formal education, the lifelong learning paradigm adhered to in the past can be re-established with the development of credit banking and multimedia technology. Due to restricted participation in higher education, a university degree has become a ticket to the social elite, with societal status taking precedence over competence and ability. The phenomenon can be reversed by a new system of open, lifelong learning. The system would allow ongoing opportunities for workers to upgrade their vocational skills, as well as provide unlimited availability to educational resources, This "educational democracy" would help eradicate social barriers, as well as recover the true essence of education: the containment of vocational and non-vocational learning. This would be achieved through a computerized academic credit banking system (CACBS), and through multimedia technology. The CACBS would allow students to register and accumulate academic credits into an academic account following strict accreditation guidelines The technology would allow for broad, interactive systems capable of widespread expansion. In addition, effective use of multimedia technology and distance delivery will provide for equitable access. Korea must shift its emphasis from elitist institutions and provide accessible "educational democracy" in order to obtain balance within the social and economical scales. (YKH)

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Two Wheels for Lifelong Learning in Korea: Credit Banking & Multimedia Technology

by Min Sun Pak

For several centuries, lifelong learning was a traditional paradigm of education in Korea. However, for almost five decades the educational establishment has focused students' energies almost solely on the preparation for writing college entrance examinations. As a result, the lifelong learning paradigm has been lost. Now, there is a new opportunity for lifelong learning in Korea. Recent commitments by policy makers to broaden access and the creation of a Bureau of Lifelong Learning suggest that the time is ripe for progressive educational change. Such change could effectively include a system of computerized academic credit banking, designed to take accreditation out of the hands of elitist universities and colleges, along with the use of technology and multimedia applications specifically in order to ensure the widespread distance delivery of learning opportunities. The goal would be a re-vitalized lifelong learning paradigm that over time will reunite vocational and non-vocational learning.

THE LOST PARADIGM

"Life is too short to finish learning." "Getting older occurs at a faster rate than does learning." "Learning from the younger generation is not shameful." These are translations of venerable Korean proverbs, and each demonstrates and emphasizes the importance and value of learning, and the fact that in Korea learning has in a traditional sense been thought to be a lifelong process. This lifelong paradigm has until recently been one of the most important and enduring characteristics of the education system, both formal and informal, in Korea.

Traditionally, learning in Korea was comprehensive in nature. The learning that took place at home worked in concert with what was learned in school, if there was a school. Formal learning and informal learning meshed. Knowledge and skills were important elements of learning, but just as important were values such as loyalty, honesty, integrity and truthfulness. All of these were a conscious part of the overall learning framework, much of which was learned at home. With three generations of Koreans occupying the conventional household, children and grandchildren were inculcated, usually by the grandparents, with such values as loyalty to the country, devotion to parents, service to the community, etiquette, wisdom, diligence, frugality, and, most importantly, a love for learning. Teaching the need for discipline, a key element in Korean society, was for the most part a specific role and responsibility of

grandparents.

Since the mid 1940s, dramatic changes have occurred in Korean society, one of the most important and far reaching being the development of new approaches and new values associated with the formal system of education. On the one hand it can be argued that educational opportunities improved, at least in the sense of number of places, the variety of opportunities, and level of studies available; however, what has been lost is much of the lifelong perspective along with the integration of the formal and the informal. The growth of formal education through the 1950s and the 1960s brought with it a divorce from the informal side, coupled with a very strong emphasis on the notion that education is first and foremost a means to an end as opposed to an end in and of itself. In particular, a system devolved which in its present state has a narrow and single-minded purpose: the writing of college entrance examinations.

In Korea, opportunities for participation in higher education are strictly limited, and access into colleges and universities is controlled through the use of entrance examinations. More than half the eligible population is prevented from attending undergraduate studies simply because the number of places available does not reflect the demand. Parents find themselves caught in a system where the only realistic opportunity appears to be for their sons and daughters to focus solely on preparatory studies for writing the college entrance tests, knowing that half will not be successful. For those who succeed, entry into university is the reward. For those who don't, the consequences are far ranging and significant. Regardless of success or failure, the costs associated with losing a system where the formal blends with the informal and where learning is valued for its own sake cannot be estimated. Korean society has lost the lifelong paradigm.

To fully appreciate this system, and the associated implications, it is important to acknowledge the fact that in Korea graduation from university is not simply an academic honour. It reflects admission to a particular position in society, and influences marriage prospects, job opportunities and even friendships. Most companies strongly differentiate between those jobs which require a university degree, regardless of qualifications or skills, and those that do not. The result is that a not so invisible barrier has been created, preventing those below from achieving their potential, and cushioning and protecting those above, regardless of ability. Social status, as determined by university graduation, has become more important than competence.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Recently there has been broad recognition of and increasing concern within Korean society for the problems associated with the emphasis on entrance tests for accessing higher education as well as the effects of limiting the number of places available. In the first instance, the educational system has evolved into one where the entire focus for learning is unidirectional, and as a result it is neither broad nor integrative. There is one goal, and students focus only on that goal. The needs of modern-day industry in Korea are substantial. Required in the workforce are a vast array of independent thinking and problem solving skills, but instead, for many years of study, the developmental emphasis is on passing a single entrance exam. Increased

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technical sophistication and global competition have further ripened the required skill set, but each year in Korea has been one where students have if anything simply become more focused on that one exam. With regard to the limitation of the number of university seats available, the effect has been one of polarization and neglect. Those who pass the test are successful, and those who do not are effectively isolated from the opportunities associated with university admission. Can a society effectively compete in a global marketplace and at the same time limit advanced educational opportunities by as much as fifty percent? In the information age, the answer is most assuredly "no".

In 1995 the Korean government initiated plans to re-develop the educational system, implementing both a more open approach and one that will support the basic premises inherent in lifelong learning (see the Education Innovation Committee, 1995). In this initiative, special attention will be paid to providing ongoing opportunities for people to upgrade their technical and vocational skills on a continuing basis. As well, the new plans call for ensuring that educational facilities and opportunities, including broader access, will be available to all citizens without restrictions that in the past have typically been associated with time and place.

The terminology "open learning" and "lifelong learning", which are at the heart of the new policies, include a variety of interrelated concepts and practices. For example, open learning, described by Johnson (1990) as emphasizing the opportunity for learners to undertake further education, regardless of age, locale, or previous experience, is critical to the new plan since it is expected that entry restrictions for higher education will be reduced or possibly eliminated, and older citizens, not just those who are at the traditional post-secondary age, will have access. Adult education, as one component of lifelong learning, and described by Lengrand (1991) as education continued throughout [or later in] life, will be newly emphasized, as will recurrent education, defined by Ironside (1991) as the discontinuous, periodic participation in educational programs [throughout life]. Similarly, Candy and Crebert's (1991) characterization of lifelong learning as being unstructured by nature, and based on the philosophy that education should be openly and easily accessible to all, at all times of life, is apropos to the new approach being developed and implemented in Korea.

Enlarging the scope of learning opportunities in all ways is the cornerstone of the new program. Without continuous learning, no worker will have job security in the environment of today, characterized as it is by an exponential growth of knowledge, rapidly developing technology, and fierce global competition. Today's shortened product life cycle and the voracious demands made by consumers for newer and better products, combine to make business tougher and more aggressive than ever before for every Asia Pacific economy. A continually upgraded workforce is at the heart of a successful business and industrial sector.

In order to implement the new program, the Korean government recently established the Bureau of Lifelong Learning. This agency operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, and in order to fulfil its tasks has assumed some of the responsibilities formerly under the control of the Bureau of International and Social Education. In the past, the term "social education" was used to describe the limited

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programs of instruction offered to students who were unsuccessful in the university entrance examination. As a result, the term and the associated bureaucracy became tainted, and were not able in the new climate to convey the full context of lifelong learning. For these reasons, a new bureau with a new vision was required.

EDUCATIONAL DEMOCRATIZATION

The emphasis on and influence of greater access to post-secondary education in Korea should not be underestimated. Since the completion of the 4th National Economic Development Plan at the end of the 1970s, there has been a strong commitment to what in Korea may be referred to as economic democracy: the right of all citizens to benefit equally with regard to the opportunities arising from the economic gains being experienced by the society as a whole. Political democracy, described here as government initiated by the people, has been a source of struggle through the 1980s, but is now a firmly established resolution.

Regardless of the changes in the economic and political climates, a large percentage of the Korean population, totalling some twenty million, continue to suffer from disparate access to the more than considerable benefits accruing from an undergraduate university education. This has led to social separation, played a significant role in determining life chances, and been a governor restricting economic growth by limiting the skills of the workforce. Through the development and introduction of the new lifelong learning policy by the government and the Bureau of Lifelong Learning, Koreans expect to enjoy what may be termed "educational democracy" by the end of the current decade.

In a society distinguished by educational democracy, everyone has freedom to access the educational establishment. Regardless of age, gender, family connections, social status, religious affiliation or geographic location, all members of the society may apply for educational access and may reasonably expect to be admitted. The influence of this measure is difficult to conceive of unless you have experienced the absence of educational democracy. Broad economic and political changes aside, the development of open access to lifelong learning opportunities in Korea for all citizens may well induce a quiet but momentous social revolution, one which results in overall ability rather than a single examination being the factor that most influences life chances, a circumstance enjoyed by other societies but to date foreign to Koreans.

RECOVERING THE ESSENCE OF EDUCATION

Continuous technological change and increased global competition, referred to earlier in this paper, have created the necessity to retrain and upgrade the skills and knowledge of all workers on a frequent basis. Only a lifelong learning paradigm encourages the re-skilling that is necessary in today's economy. The move back to a society which prizes learning for the sake of learning and makes learning opportunities widely available will go a long way to satisfy the demands arising from technical and economic forces. To keep your job in a changing environment, you will need to be frequently re-trained. To get a promotion you will need to develop new skills. To become re-employed if your job has become outdated or unnecessary, you

will need fresh expertise. However, what of the non-vocational side of lifelong learning? According to traditional Korean ideology, the real essence of education is bound up with gaining maturity, wisdom, self-improvement and enrichment, and simply appreciating the joy of learning. To date, that essence has been lost or set aside in the competition to succeed with the post-secondary entrance examinations. Will the development of an open access educational system, and lifelong learning opportunities for all, encourage educational recovery with regard to the essence or the non-vocational side of learning? This is an important question, and one that deserves considerable consideration on the part of policy makers and educational theorists.

Korean society, in the first half of this century and earlier, was traditionally bound together by its system of education where the norms, values, beliefs and mores were learned as part of an informal process through the lifespan. The society was stronger and more productive because of the common threads taught to all. A lifelong learning system that focuses *only* on the vocational side of education will not do justice to the informal side of learning, the side where throughout learning the people become a society. However, it can be argued that a stronger vocational side, one where access is open, broad abilities are emphasized, and a lifelong perspective advocated, can provide the foundation for the development of the non-vocational side.

That foundation will rest in part on having people experience the broader values and benefits associated with education. For example, as described earlier, on-going vocational education can lead to greater job stability, increased job enhancement, more opportunities for on-the-job promotions and overall greater economic well-being. This will sow the seeds for the re-birth of learning for the sake of learning, providing of course that the promises associated with vocational learning are in fact delivered. In this regard, it is important that Korean policy makers work to avoid the sorts of problems that have become associated with vocational education, a number of which are apparent in systems where open access has been the norm.

Two problems typically associated with vocational education include: (a) requiring all learners to learn the same curricula in the same way, and not adequately, if at all, taking into account experiences that are not accredited university experiences; and (b) not embracing technology to maximize educational benefits. In order to create the most productive environment for open access and lifelong learning in Korea, and one that will encourage the re-birth of the essence of education, the inclusion of non-vocational alongside vocational, this paper argues for the utilization of a computerized academic credit banking system as well as the incorporation of multimedia technology as a foundation for virtually all educational activities.

COMPUTERIZED ACADEMIC CREDIT BANKING SYSTEM

Systems and bureaucracies quickly become entrenched, taking on a life of their own and often neglecting the needs of those for whom they were originally established. Nowhere is this more apparent than with traditional educational bureaucracies, and requirements for all students to take the same courses, regardless of whether or not they already have the skills. Students should be allowed, or perhaps even required, to record lifetime learning, noting courses taken, seminars completed, job tasks

demonstrated, and skills achieved, and courses should be increasingly competency-based, allowing students to work specifically on the development of the skills or competencies they lack, while simply demonstrating those they already possess.

Along with these changes, and in part to initiate some, a computerized academic credit banking system (CACBS) should be established. The CACBS would allow students to register and accumulate academic credits into an academic account following strict but objective accreditation guidelines. Certificates, diplomas, licenses and even degrees would be conferred at such time as the accumulated academic credits satisfy appropriate graduation or accreditation criteria. The CACBS would allow students to take credits from a variety of educational institutions without traditional limitations such as time or type of institution, and the computerized nature would allow for a broad-based, interactive system that in time could be expanded, at least regionally, within the Asia Pacific area. Within Korea the benefits for firms as well as for individuals would be considerable, and a scheme of this nature would help respond to demands for greater regional labour mobility, a goal voiced by various organizations including the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum.

In the current environment, there are many vested interests associated with the maintenance of individual institutions, particularly colleges and universities, each of which has its own standards for admission, coursework and graduation. In today's environment, the issue of whether students attend college to get an education or get a degree is critical. For many students, particularly in the age of the entrance examination, attendance at university is for the sole purpose of getting the degree. If standards for degree attainment were consistent, yet flexible, transparent and widely available, students attending university under the new access policy would be encouraged to select institutions on the basis of the learning provided. Further, students would not be locked into an institution for the entire degree program, and required to go through additional courses and irrelevant material simply because the individual institution with its monopoly has become the locus for all learning decisions.

The development of a CACBS in Korea will not be easy. To date, the recognition of academic credits between universities and colleges is not a common practice. As monopoly-like institutions, they simply don't have to cooperate given that the demand for seats in higher education during the course of the past fifty years has far outstripped supply. Universities and colleges have become accustomed to their privileged status, a result of the bottleneck established by government policies. Competition, and the good things it often brings to systems economic and otherwise, are absent. Although educational reform has been recommended almost biennially within Korea, usually in the name of an educational review or policy direction, little has changed. The opportunities associated with the development of the Bureau of Lifelong Learning augur for great potential, but only if the universities and colleges can be forced to more freely compete and students are allowed choices and awarded credit based on objective, open criteria.

Gradual implementation of CACBS is suggested, especially with regard to the identification of institutions for initial development and participation. In order to signal the importance and value of the system, it would be best to begin with nation

al post-secondary institutions, focusing on mutual accreditation for academic credits among universities and colleges. The second stage would be the inclusion of educational and training institutions affiliated with universities or colleges. These would include specialized institutes. Third into the mix would be not-for-profit, municipal government schools as well as community organizations. This recognition would begin the notion of formally bringing the vocational and non-vocational sides of lifelong learning into the same paradigm. The fourth and final group would be private institutions operating on a for-profit basis.

The benefits associated with a CACBS are considerable, particularly in Korea where the problems identified with the under-supply of post-secondary educational opportunities and the isolated and elitist institutions are considerable. For this reason, the development of objective and strictly consistent standards must be emphasized. These should be a government priority and a government responsibility, perhaps associated with the new Bureau of Lifelong Learning.

MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

A truly open, highly accessible and relevant system of vocational and non-vocational learning will only be achieved if it incorporates distance delivery and a learner-centred philosophy. In the first instance, though Korea is not a particularly large country, still the population is spread across a geographic area that makes access to the large cities for the purpose of attending fixed-place, educational institutions improbable for a substantial portion of the population. Distance delivery can resolve the issue, and will in effect do much to make access equitable.

Second, in order to respond to the total demand at times which suit the learner, and to ensure that technical education in particular reflects the technology of the day, education cannot continue in all its forms to be teacher- and institution-centred. The availability of educational opportunities only when the teacher is ready will not achieve the goals described in this paper. What is required is the effective use of new technology, including distance education and interactive multimedia technologies to deliver learning opportunities throughout the country and perhaps throughout Asia Pacific regions.

Multimedia technology is still very much in its infancy, but even at this stage it is clear there is a revolution afoot in education. No longer are students dependent on teachers, and no longer do institutions have a monopoly on learning. Certification continues to be a holy grail, but it too will soon be transformed. In fact, traditional learning as experienced by today's adults may already be an artifact, tenaciously clinging to life only because it is what we have come to know best and because it creates conventional jobs for many who have benefited from the system. Regardless, multimedia technology, including access to the Internet and the World Wide Web, will give young and old the broadest opportunities and the best learning anywhere and anytime. It will transform the way in which we live by connecting people with more information more quickly and in a more usable fashion than any of us are likely able to imagine. The challenge for Korea is twofold: blend its new found commitment to access and open education with a system that ensures institutions compete to meet the needs of students; and, at the same time, put resources into

developing multimedia learning applications and distance education technology.

In an important first step, the Government of Korea plans to install fibre optic cable into every home by the year 2015 as part of its commitment to ensure broad access to the information superhighway. High-performance connections between homes, schools, workplaces, libraries, and community centres will be a major step towards fulfilling the obligation to bring accessible and lifelong learning to the people, for the democratization of education if you will, as well as for creating a venue that will once again bring the vocational and non-vocational elements of learning together in order to create a single platform. The challenges may be intimidating, but the rewards are clearly unparalleled. For Korea, the opportunities associated with lifelong learning may be the most socially important and meaningful of the 21st century.

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